

**Reflections on the concepts of 'Nation State' & 'Civil Society'**  
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The Nation State:

Critically reflecting on the modern nation state I am reminded of, Ali Jimale Ahmed in his article, in the book "The Invention of Somalia" citing Raymond Williams, the Year 2000: "'Nation' as a term is radically connected with 'native'. We are born into relationships, which are typically settled in a place. The form of primordial and 'placeable' bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance. Yet the jump from that to anything like the modern nation state is entirely 'artificial.'" [i]. If the process which forms the modern nation state does not occur naturally, but is rather an artificial man made process, think about the context of Africa, looking through the historical lenses of the 19th century colonial genocide, the people of the continent were denied any peaceful process of socio-political evolution; one is left constantly wondering what could have been the fate of Africa without the colonial legacies What went wrong with the nation state in Africa, Somalia? At the dawn of independence, African countries pursued nation-building ideologies, which, according to Wamba's formula as cited by Shivji, can be summarized as: "one people, one nation, one political party and one supreme leader" [ii] (Shivji, 2000, p.30). And as it is evident from history and the analysis of authors like Wamba (1991a), Shivji (1986), in the context of postcolonial nation-building ideologies, the state itself was replica of the colonial tyrannical state. The main common characteristic of post-independence African states was the concentration of power in the executive arm of the state. According to Shivji, during the economic crisis in the late seventies, many African states lost their political legitimacy resulting in a breakdown of broad consensus. He further argues that democracy, as a way of resistance and as a method of organizing and constituting a new consensus, is very much on the agenda. However, Shivji analyzing the little impact or change, that hasty conversion to political multi-partyism and economic liberalization have had on improving the difficult conditions of life in the continent, calls for a deeper interrogation of the process of democratization. Shivji emphasizes the fact that narrowly defined ideologies have fell short of building a new consensus that can hold Third World societies together [iii] , unless they are solidly linked to the local realities of the people of these societies. Is there a Role for Civil Society in rebuilding Somalia? The short answer to this question is an unequivocal yes, the role civil society can potentially play in rebuilding Somalia and safe guarding a lasting peace cannot be overemphasized, in my opinion. According to Célestin Monga, to define civil society is an ambitious task particularly because of the extensiveness of the recent literature on the concept. In his book [iv] , Monga defines it as "...new spaces for communication and discussion over which the state has no control".

Definition: According to Dr. M. Abdi Mohamed (Gandhi), civil society as it is being defined in the current context of Somalia encompasses two streams of Somali society: 1) traditional civil society which consists of clan-based community leaders/elders; 2) urban-based, non-traditional, civil society which consists of academics, professionals, peace building organizations, human rights activist organizations, community development NGOS, community groups. After the collapse of the state in Somalia, the elders have played a key role in negotiating peace processes in different parts of the country. The traditional leaders and urban members of Somali civil society have been instrumental in relatively stabilizing the country for the last decade. Recommendation for the road ahead there is numerous challenges and difficulties facing civil society in the Somali situation but these are not insurmountable. One major challenge facing Somali civil society is the inherent contradiction that exists in the chosen path of sharing political power long clan lines and the fundamental rights of women to political representation. As Somalis grapple with finding the right path to democratic process, and the incorporation of solid conflict resolution principles, in the context of a society stratified along clan lines, peace negotiations inevitably are debated and negotiated through the process of sharing power along clan lines. One might wonder if this is the only way out of this anarchic situation, are there other paths open for Somalis? Maybe there are, but right now, the distribution of political power along clan lines is the option being pursued. I would like to conclude with some suggestions and recommendations for the road ahead. First, there ought to be endeavours searching for ways to build new consensus for the country and entire continent. According

to I.G. Shivji, there are important issues that need to be addressed for the pursuit of building new consensus. These are: “ popular livelihoods, popular participation and popular power or sovereignty” [v]. In this analysis, the author uses the term ‘ popular ’ a) in a way that rejects the narrow definition of the postcolonial nation building in Africa; b) the term is to capture the broad based masses, which constitute the social core of the new consensus; c) the term should encompass culture and tradition as the most important aspects of ideological forms [vi]. For these ‘critical elements’, as Shivji puts it, to be realized the tasks ahead are indeed challenging, but not impossible to achieve. Civil society and a new leadership in Somalia, with substantial support from the international community, need to engage in and implement ‘Trans-formative Education’ and the strengthening of civil society. Trans-formative education is an opportunity to educate the masses, in and outside of classrooms, providing them with a process to learning through historical reflections and challenging the customary dichotomies between the personal and the public. A critical aspect of trans-formative education is, the fact that it builds on people’s strength as well as their previous knowledge. Somali civil society can participate in processes that can realize: Good governance, that is not driven by mainstream (i.e. World Bank) popular agenda, but rather good governance which is rooted in local realities and attempts to deal with the unique complexities of the Somali situation.

Poverty alleviation programs, which are sustainable and long term, oriented as oppose to one-time projects that provide short-term solutions. Closely linked to sustainable development are disarmament initiatives that provide the opportunity for lasting peace. And last but not least, ‘substantive gender equity’, which can be the most difficult to achieve in the short term given that Somalis are resolving and rebuilding societal trust on the bases of clan lineages.

[i] Ahmed, Ali Jimale; “Daybreak Is Near, Won’t You Become Sour?: Going Beyond the Current Rhetoric In Somali Studies”; in “The Invention of Somalia” edited by Ahmed, Ali Jimale; Published by Red Sea Press Inc; p. 135

[ii] “Reflections on Leadership in Africa: Forty Years After Independence” edited by Haroub Othman; published by VUB University Press, 2000 chap. 3 “Critical Elements of a New democratic Consensus in Africa” p.30

[iii] ibid

[iv] “The Anthropology of Anger: Civil Society and Democracy in Africa” by Célestin Monga, translated by Linda L. Flec & Célestin Monga, published by Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996, chap. I

[v] “Reflections On Leadership in Africa: Forty Years After Independence” , edited by Haroub Othman; 2000 “Critical Elements of New Democratic Consensus in Africa” by i.G. Shivji

[vi] ibid, p. 32